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From P'an Ku we derive Yin and Yang. He is the primeval man born from the egg. One day the egg split open and the top half became the sky and the bottom half the Earth. After 18,000 years, P'an Ku died and split into a number of parts. His Head formed Sun and Moon. His Blood the Rivers and Seas. His Hair the Forests, Sweat the Rain, Breath the Wind, and Voice the Thunder. His Fleas became the Ancestors of Mankind.



"If you don't know where you are going, then any road can take you there"

- George Harrison

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Jonathan Pace "Woman in Cloth" (Conte)

Soliloquy

after a Bacon triptych

O reader, self,
What brought us to this
Orange room

Defying perspective?
No ordered walk
Of the surpliced can divorce

Our eyes from skin.
The grass tan as wood scrap,
A strangle of briar,

Sowing of cactus needles
That bleeds feet.
They smell that blood,

Three armless hags,
Crane their necks at our stir –
Our trespass

On that keyhole patch
Of tawn blades.
We cannot help but be

In reach as they bare teeth,
And over those bald harpies
Stiff as furniture,

On its cross
Of clavicle and spine,
Hear pound a cageless heart.

Nailed to the gold vein of nerve.

Time Standing Still

The art of his touch keeps her in a state of frozen vertigo
She is still and silent yet feels the earth move, feels the earth rotate
Humanity does not pause for these little moments, moments
that take lifetimes to explain, to jot down, to cast into stone.
The story has already reached an end and started over as
his fingers run over the laces, refusing to untie them but
fathoming under them just to feel and comprehend her skin,
feel the wall of her spine give slightly as the vertigo lapses.
There are no torrents or cries of defining moments.
It is all slow and obscured, like water and crystal in the
snowglobe meeting, not mixing; touching upon each other
as if handling butterfly wings, barely catching powder.
His hand touches her thigh but he doesn't grab it,
he has no need for claim, no desire for territory — his fingers
could be carbon leaving the barest mark of prints on her skin.
He is fanatical, but not crazy, not overwhelmed by a man's needs.
Not driven over the edge by the folding of bodies, the rising
of temperatures, the way the heart cries for something sweeter
than blood. The world lies hen it whispers that underneath
it all, this is nothing but the heat and the drive of lust and release.



Jeff Griffin "Back to the Roost"

South Beach

Francisco Silveira

From the window of a rundown hotel room I shared with my mother on Miami Beach, I used to look at the moonlit ocean and dream. I was nineteen and madly in love with Debby; and I dreamed of marrying her and moving out of that roach-infested ghetto. I wasn't happy, but my love for Debby made life tolerable until a surfer called Bill Farland appeared on the scene. The tall muscular blond began playing for Debby's attention the day he arrived. It reached a point of intolerance the day she dumped me for him. One day, he was on the pier with his two friends. The petite blond I loved was there, too. He'd an arm around her waist, and that hurt me like hell. I took my sheathed fishing knife from my waist belt, put it on the pier's wall and said, "Hey, take your dirty paws off my girl!"

He said, "She used to be your girl... now she is mine!"

Pulling her by an arm, I said, "Debby, let's go!"

She pulled back and said, "Tony ... leave me alone!"

Bill, with both arms around her, pulled her back. I said, "Let go of her, or I'll break your fucking face!"

He let of her and said, "What the fuck's the matter with you? If it's a fight what you want ... let's get it on!" We lashed at each other like two male caribou in mating season. We kicked, punched, rolled on the hot pavement, and scratched each other. During the rumble, we scattered fishing gear all over the pier's floor. An irate fisherman threw a cold bucket of water at us. Then, a group of fishermen put an end to the fight and called it a tie. Battered and bloodied I said, "It's not over yet ... Next time it will be different!"

"Next time bring a machine-gun ... you may scare

me!" With nerves in high gear, I turned around and came face to face with Anna Smith. Anna, a brunette beauty with a fantastic body, was my best friend and confidant since third grade. She said, "What's the matter, Tony Miller? Why were you fighting that man?"

"He took my girlfriend away from me!"

"It's not his fault ... blame her!"

Anna, glancing at the sea, said, "Yes, but does she love you?"

"She has told me many times that she loves me."

"Right now, she isn't showing either love or respect for you."

"Anna, you don't know how painful rejection is."

Putting back a strand of hair that the wind stubbornly kept bringing to her forehead, she said, "She rejected you. He only exposed her weakness!"

Feeling very emotional, I said, "I hate him!"

"You shouldn't. Hate and jealousy are too heavy ... contempt is lighter."

Anna, looking into my eyes, said, "I'm waiting to be discovered by the man I love."

"Really? What happens if he never discovers you?"

"If he gets married, I'll suffer a lot, but I'll get over it."

A little puzzled, I said, "I thought love hadn't knocked at your door yet."

"It did. And the uncertainty I feel about that love is killing me."

We both looked at a fish jumping on the hot floor and I said, "Anna, I'd be better off if I hadn't fallen in love!"

"Don't say that ... it's better to love and lose than never to be in love."

"Most guys my age live happy lives without girlfriends."

"You think so?"

"Yes. Every human being needs lots of love."

"Anna, all I aspire in life is to have a woman who loves me with the intensity I love."

"Look around. You'll find her." My two old pals, Flaco, and Mondongo, joined us and put an end to our conversation. I asked Anna, "When can we see each other again?"

"Any time you want. You have my phone number and you know where I live." Anna said goodbye and left.

My friends and I sat on the pier wall and discussed the fight. Flaco, tall and skinny, was a good fighter. So was Mondongo, who was short, stocky and awkward. I asked them their opinion about the fight. "Mira, chico. What I learned about the fight," said Mondongo, "is that that kid is a hard nut."

"What you mean 'hard nut', man? You think I can't handle him?"

"He's got skills, man ... he stopped most of your blows!"

"I know I can beat that guy!" said I.

"Ai caramba, man, be real ... the guy is about your size, but he is much faster than you are."

Glancing at the sea, I said, "I caught him quite a few times with my punches."

Stuttering a little bit, Mondongo said, "He was open for a kick at his huevos, when you tried it, he made you miss."

"Flaco, what you think?" I asked.

"We'll fight as a team. After finishing off his two friends, we'll hang up on him."

I asked, "You think it will work?"

"Of course it will work," said Flaco, "Remember in

Beach High? When we took on five guys?"

"Yeah," said Mondongo, "when we fight as a team, we become a lean mean machine!"

"So, do we all agree that next time we'll fight them as a team?" asked Flaco.

"Yes!" Mondongo and I answered in unison. We celebrated the decision with three right fists coming together

at the same time. I felt very happy with the decision, although I pretended I didn't.

The fabulous sunset of Miami was taking place at that exact moment. The big red circle, surrounded by orange, contrasted immensely with the deep blue of the sky. Pelicans were still assaulting the pilchards on the water surface. Bait on the surface also meant that some predators were attacking it from under. A flock of seagulls flew by. Some lights began to appear in the row of hotels molding the long stretch of the beach to the north.

To the south, a cruise liner was coming between the jetties on its way into the Port of Miami. I could hear the murmur of the waves splashing on the white sands and smell the unique fragrance of the cool sea breezes. Fishermen were leaving the pier, and our group began preparations for another night of shark fishing.

We had two sturdy solid fishing rods equipped with two 6/0 Penn reels, rigged with 80-lb. Test fishing line, one-yard long 150-lb. Test wire leader, a 150-lb. Test swivel and a 14/0 Eagle Claw hook. That evening we had a live blue runner, which we hooked close to its dorsal fin and let it swim until it hopefully would find the object of our labor.

*I could hear the
murmur of the waves
splashing on the white
sands and smell the
unique fragrance of
the cool sea breezes.*

We baited the other rig with a big shank of fresh tuna. Flaco got on a surfboard, paddled 200 feet out into the ocean, and left the bait there. We ate some sandwiches, sat on the reel ratchets, and hopped into sleeping bags.

At midnight, the reel's ratchet of the rig with the tuna shank woke us up with a long shriek. I jumped up, grabbed the rod, and gently started feeling the tension on the line. I felt it loosen. That meant that the fish had taken the hook and swam in our direction, or tasted the bait and left it for the moment. Then, he would turn around and come back for more. Keeping the line tense, I knew exactly what he was doing on the other side of it. Instead of grabbing the whole bait, he was loosening it a little bit at a time. In a while, the tugging stopped. I said, "Concha su madre ... oh, man! Can you believe it?"

"What happened?" asked Mondongo.

"The son of a bitch took off with the bait!"

"No te preocupes," said Mondongo. "We still have one left."

"Damned smart fish," I said. "So much work for nothing." I reeled in the whole line, put the rod against the waist high pier wall, and went back to sleep. At three thirty in the morning, the ratchet on the second reel announced loudly that the live blue runner had met its fate. At lightning speed, Flaco got up, jerked the rod back strongly, and shouted, "I got it ... I got it hooked!"

Mondongo and I shouted a few screams of triumph and exchanged high-fives. It took us three hours to land the big fish. We'd reel in as much line as we could when we had him coming our way, and gave him line when he headed out to the sea, so that he wouldn't break it. Finally, we got off the pier and landed him on the sandy beach. In the morning, we had the six and a half foot hammerhead ex-predator hanging from a fence, so that everybody could admire our triumph. When it comes to predators, man is the king.

Next day, the surf was rough and we sat on the sea wall while the surfers did their thing. Bill was surfing and Debby sat on the beach. Now she was a surfer's girl. I said, "Look at her, I can't believe she left me for a guy she hardly knows."

"Fuck her!" said Flaco. "She isn't worth it!"

"You know what?" asked Mondongo.

"What? What?" asked Flaco and me.

"She has the mouth of a stingray."

"Why you say that?" I asked.

"I discovered it yesterday when she said, 'Tony ... leave me alone!'" said Mondongo, mimicking her voice.

"Yeah, I saw that, too!" said Flaco. "Besides, her mother is an ugly fat little bitch."

"What's that got to do with her?" I asked.

"Genes ... " said Flaco. "She's got her mother's genes ... she'll be a little fat mama!"

"You know what makes me mad?" asked Mondongo.

"What?" I asked.

"It's seeing you walking around the beach like a whipped dog ... get over it, man!"

"No seas huevon," said Flaco. "There's thousands of girls like her in this town." I said, "Let's stop the bullshit and make plans for tonight."

That night, we decided not to go shark fishin. Instead, we decided to spend the evening hanging out in front of Biscayne Dog Racetrack, and see what was cooling on Ocean Drive sidewalk between Biscayne and First Street, where all the action was. In that small piece of real estate, drug sales and prostitute pick-ups were common occurrences. Fistfights could take place there any time of the day or night. I knew most of the drug pushers in the area. That night I was a weirdo pusher called el Gavilan talking to the Farland's small gang. I wondered if they were buying for their own use, or if it was for resale. El Gavilan was a small Latin man

with black hair sticking upwards as if it was made of steel wire. He had a crooked eye, which gave the illusion that he was always looking at two people at the same time ... sometimes he was. Many people wondered how he survived in the rough environment of drug dealing. It didn't surprise me, though, because I'd seen him cut up people's faces with knives and razor blades. The local thugs didn't mess with him. The ones who gave him trouble were the outsiders, but they would soon find out that they were better off staying away from him. They talked for a while. Then, Bill and Gavilan walked in the beach's direction and disappeared in the darkness of the night. "How about that?" said Mondongo. "They're doing drugs!"

"We don't know," said Flaco, "they may be in the dealing business."

"It seems to me," I said, "that something fishy is going on here."

"Let's keep an eye on them," said Flaco.

There was a big commotion in front of Carnival Ice Cream. We went to check it out. Two sixteen or seventeen-year-old girls were punching each other silly for Squirrel's love. Squirrel was a local kid, who got that nickname because he had smart little eyes like a squirrel's and a great vertical jump. The way the girls boxed each other, the skill, and the power of their punches was impressive. A big circle of people was formed around them, inciting the fight. I jumped between the two, held and protected the weakest one, and broke up the fight. I got a choir of verbal abuse from the onlookers. It's unbelievable how bloodthirsty the world became. "Hey, asshole! Why did you stop the fight" said a kid I knew by sight.

"You're an asshole! I stopped the fight because I felt like it." The kid came forward, pressed his chest against mine, made himself tall and gave me an intimidating stare. I made myself taller and stared menacingly back at him.

Neither of us blinked. The situation became very tense. One more would ignite our passions. The fight was inevitable.

"Stop it, my friends! Fighting doesn't solve anything," said Jose Nunez. Nunez was a well-known and well-respected man all over the beach. "What are you fighting for?"

"He got mad at me because I stopped the girls' fight."

"Tony," said Nunez, "what's the sense of stopping the girls' fight and starting one of your own?"

"Yeah," I said, "that's kind of silly." Playing with the gold chain hanging from his neck, Nunez said to the other kid, "Cool it, tough guy, fighting won't get you anything but trouble." While we were talking to Nunez, two ugly black cats were viciously lashing at each other. They pawed and bit each other on the park's grass, until one of them lost his nerve and found refuge on top of a tall palm tree. Then, a group of children formed a serpentine line running around the park.

After an exchange of profanity between the most excited spectators and me, we walked to the pier to discuss the plans for the next day. We sat on the pier's wall, breathing the cool night sea breezes, and Flaco said, "You know guys? The fishermen were catching some mackerel this afternoon."

"Maybe there'll be a good run tomorrow," I said.

"The first cold front of the year blew in this afternoon. If the bait comes under the pier, there will be plenty of fish to be caught," said Mondongo.

"One of us has to come here at six in the morning," I said. "To make sure we get our places at the front wall."

"I'll come," said Flaco.

"OK, you can come," I said, "but you gotta keep an eye on the equipment...many people around...you know?"

"Don't worry man," said Flaco. "Nobody is going to touch our stuff."

"Guys, tomorrow we're going to make ourselves some bread," said Mondongo.

"It's about time," I said. "We haven't been making much lately."

"Let's go home and rest ourselves," said Flaco. "We may have a big day ahead of us tomorrow."

When I was passing by Anna's house, she came outside and said, "Hi Tony, how are you?"

"I'm fine, and you?"

She said, "I'm OK."

I asked her. "Anna, I don't see you on the beach as much as before. Are you working?"

"Yes I am. I intended to tell you the other day on the pier. But with all the commotion and everything, I forgot."

"Congratulations! What kind of work are you doing?"

"I work as a secretary for a law firm. You should try to find a good job, Tony."

"The only work I've been able to get has been in supermarkets. They paid me minimum wages, and acted as if they owned me."

Playing with a button of her blouse, she said, "You should go to college."

"I'm thinking about it, but I'm not sure if I'll be able to achieve anything."

"Of course you are! You must trust yourself."

We both looked up and saw a comet streaking through the star studded sky. She asked me, "Did you make a wish?"

"Yes I did. And you?"

"I also made one."

I said, "If you tell me yours, I'll tell you mine!"

She said, "Not today. I'll tell it to you some time in the future."

I said, "That's a deal."

We were very close to each other. Her eyes twinkled, bathed by the moonlight. My male instincts were in full alert.

I embraced and kissed her passionately. We kept on kissing each other for a long time, and when we said goodbye, I went home with a good feeling. For the first time in my life, I realized that Anna was a beautiful woman.

I arrived on the pier at seven in the morning. The place was already packed with people.

"Any action?" I asked Flaco.

"It looks promising," he said. "They began running half an hour ago; I caught a couple." I looked in the bucket and saw two decent-sized fish. Mondongo arrived, and both of us took our places at the front wall. I threw a gill net into the water, caught some pilchards, and placed them in the aerated bucket to keep them alive. By nine AM the mackerel run was in full swing. Fisherman stood shoulder to shoulder with their bellies firmly pressed against the pier walls. Their concentration on the task at hand was absolute. Everything and everybody moved and got agitated in a constant state of frenzy. Fisherman were busy baiting their hooks with live pilchards, casting, reeling fish in, taking fish from the hooks, and keeping them in safe places.

Some people cleaned and sold the fish on a big table, which had running fresh water located in the middle of the pier. A little distance from the war zone, tourists and other onlookers moved from side to side; wherever the action was most intense.

To avoid accidents, there was a no man's land between the fishermen and the public. Seagulls and pelicans hovered over the wave crests looking for pilchards that had fallen from the hooks. Sometimes, the birds got caught on the hooks, and the fisherman would reel them in and set them free. Sounds of triumph from the success mixed with the curses and blasphemy from the ones who, after bringing their fish up the wall, lost it in the last minute. Others had the fish two or three feet out of the water and barracuda would jump in the air and cut it in two pieces with the precision of

magic scissors. The voices came out in English, French, Spanish, Portuguese, and Yiddish.

By late afternoon, we had caught about a hundred fish between the three of us. Flaco, who was the best salesman, set up shop at the table and began selling the fish. There were no scales. He priced the fish according to their sizes. If the client knew how to bargain, he or she would get a couple of dollars shaved off the original price. At the end of the day, we had three hundred and twenty-five dollars, which was a small fortune for our standards. Jose Nunez showed up, and I let him fish with my equipment. When he finished, I asked him, "How many have you caught?"

He said, "I killed three. I'll give them to a friend, because I don't cook."

A few days later, we were preparing for another night of shark fishing. All of a sudden, the weather changed. Strong winds started blowing from the sea. Black rainy clouds moved through the sky, pushed by the strong wind. A waterspout could be seen far out over the water, and ten foot waves jumped over the jetty into the channel. We were the only people there until Farland and his friends showed up. When they got close to us, Farland said, "I'm here to finish what you started the other day, unless you want to apologize and hide behind your friends!"

"Fuck you man! You aren't half the man I am!"

"I didn't come here to argue. Get rid of your stupid knife and let's dance."

I put the knife on the top of our fishing gear and took off my shirt. Moving to the center of the pier, I said, "Come on...son of a bitch, show me what you've got!" Kicks and punches began to fly. From the corner of my eye, I saw my friends get it on with his two friends. The man fighting Mondongo got slapped around and was thrown onto our gear. Mondongo came to the help of Flaco and forgot about the kid he had thrown on the floor. When I pushed Farland

away, I saw the kid coming at me with my fishing knife pointed at my heart. I thought my life was going to end right there, but Farland caught his arm, smoothing the blow, and changed the trajectory of the knife. Farland pushed the kid away and said, "Stupid son of a bitch! See what you did?"

He had plunged the knife into my stomach. Moments later, I became lightheaded and began falling down. Farland softened my fall and shouted to my friends, "Go to the phones at the end of the pier and call an ambulance!" Flaco took off like a deer in the direction of the phones.

"Mondongo," said Farland, "give me your T-shirt." He wrapped the T-shirt around the knife, and pressed the cloth against the wound without removing the knife. Then he asked me, "How do you feel Tony?"

"Just a little tired," I said.

Farland said, "Hold on, Tony! Help's on the way!" In just ten minutes, the ambulance rolled into the pier and came to a close halt where I was. The paramedics tended to my wound, put me in the ambulance, and in a few minutes I was on the operating table in the Mount Sinai Hospital. Five days after surgery, I was brought home to hear a big sermon from my mother. "Tony. You should have a hard look at your life...the way you are living it, it's gonna get you killed."

"This is the way I've lived all my life!"

My mother said, "Before, this area was a peaceful place. But now we're in the seventies...things have changed."

"What can I do?"

"Go back to school, or learn a profession. Stay away from the pier and Ocean Drive before it's too late."

"I've tried to stay away from trouble, but it's very difficult to live in a troubled area and not be affected by it."

My mother covered my exposed shoulder with the blanket and said, "I know, son. We've been here too long."

I said, "I understand our situation. The accident has opened my eyes."

My mother said, "You should seek some advice on what you need to do to have a future-unless you want to live in the ghetto for the rest of your life."

"I dream about the day I can get away from this dilapidated area. I'll do whatever it takes...I promise, Mama."

"When your father abandoned us, we came to live here because of the cheap rent."

"I'll help you, Mama."

She gave me a kiss and said, "Now, try to rest. We'll talk about it later."

Later on, my friends came to visit me. Flaco said, "That son of a bitch almost killed you! But after you left, I gave him a good paliza!"

"What did you tell the police about the stabbing?" I asked.

"It was an accident," said Flaco.

"I said the same thing at the hospital. Did you talk to Farland after the fight?"

"Yes, we talked to him a few times. He's very sorry for what happened...he wants to apologize," said Mondongo. We talked for about half an hour. Soon after they left, Anna came to visit me. She was wearing a short sleeve black dress, which combined nicely with her black hair and white complexion. She kissed me and said, "How are you feeling, Tony?"

"Better, much better...I should be fine in a couple of weeks."

She said, "You must be careful! There are a lot of dangerous people out there."

"I know," I said. "I've lived here all my life...I've seen a lot." She played with my hair and said, "You should stay away from the pier, it is too dangerous!"

"I said, 'The whole neighborhood is dangerous.'"

She said, "I don't like to live here."

I said, "I dream about the day I can get away from this bug infested ghetto!"

Playing with her necklace, she said, "Did Debby come to see you?"

"No, she didn't."

"How do you feel about it?"

"She's a phony and a traitor...I'm through with her."

"That's good news! I mean, she doesn't deserve your love."

"No, she doesn't." She was holding my hand, and it had a calming effect on me. I asked her, "Anna, should we reveal to each other the wishes we made that night?"

Anna said, "I think we should, but you go first!"

"That night I wished to be your mysterious man...am I?"

"Of course you are! I've loved you my whole life!"

Caressing her hand, I said, "I liked you a lot, but because we grew up together, I only considered you a good friend."

She asked, "How do you see me now?"

"I see in you the woman I've always dreamed about!"

She said, "I love you Tony!"

Looking deep into her eyes, I said, "I love you too, Anna!" She was sitting on the bed real close to me. Her big black eyes were sparkling with mysterious promises. Strong urges of sexual desires assaulted my senses. Our heads came closer together and our lips joined in a passionate, long kiss. The warmth of her mouth made me dream oceans of pleasure. My left hand was caressing her beautiful legs and coming up under her skirt. When it reached paradise, she said, "Tony stop, we've to save it for a special day!"

After a lot of kisses and touches, she said goodbye and left.

Two weeks later, I was walking on the pier when I met Farland. He said, "Hi Tony! How do you feel?"

"Much better, thank you."

"It was a close call. Wasn't it?" said he.

"It sure was...thanks for saving my life."

"You're welcome. I only regret that we reached such an extreme."

"These things happen...it is part of growing up, I guess."

He said, "It was kind of a wake-up call for me, too. In a couple of weeks, I'll go home and look for a job." A tall, black-robed priest with a wooden cross hanging from his neck passed by us.

"How about Debby?" I asked.

"You can have her back. After what happened to you, I lost interest.."

"I don't want her, either. I can't love someone I don't trust."

"I think it's a good decision. I only regret coming between you two."

I said, "In a strange way, you helped me to know her better." We shook hands and he said, "I wish you a fast recovery...see you around."

I said, "Thanks, and good luck to you!"

I sat on the pier's wall looking at the immensity of the sea, and thinking of how strange we humans are. Just a few days back, we had been mortal enemies. We fought like two wild beasts, then in a noble gesture, he saved my life and proved that he wasn't the rotten person I thought he was. Many wars happen because we've misconceptions about the other side, and choose savage action over civilized dialog. So absorbed was I in my thoughts that I hadn't noticed the arrival of my friends.

They said, "Hi, Tony! What are you thinking about?"

"Nothing, just looking at the sea. What are the plans for tonight?" I asked.

"We decided to spend a couple of hours at the races...then we'll try to catch a shark. If it's all right with you," said Flaco.

"I don't gamble, but I'll enjoy the happiness and enthusiasm of the people."

"I'll gamble for the both of us!" said Flaco with a big

smile. So, that night, we went to the Biscayne Racetrack. In a circular arena, the dogs raced after a fake electrically powered hare, which magically disappeared from their sights, as soon as the race was over. The organization had the ability to fool both man and beast. The area was surrounded by the stands with the exception of a small place where the placards announcing the races' results stood. A man's voice amplified by powerful loudspeakers announced the races. "Ladies and gentlemen, you have two minutes left to place your bets for the fifth race. Two minutes!" At this announcement, people would rush to the ticket windows to place their bets. The

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racetrack was a poor people gambling enterprise, because most of its patrons were blue-collar workers. I used to stay at the door and watch their happy faces when they were going in. On their way out, there weren't many happy faces left. The races absorbed my friends' attention, but I had an eye on Gavilan. At about 10:00 P.M., I saw Gavilan exchange a nod with Farland. Gavilan exited the dog track followed by Farland. Suarez discreetly followed them at a distance. I tried to follow the three, but got caught in a bid crowd exiting the

arena, and lost sight of them. I knew some kind of deal was going to take place Gavilan and Farland. I had my doubts if they were aware of Suarez following them. I returned to the racetrack to join my friends. They had already lost more than they could afford. So, we decided to hang around Ocean Drive for a couple of hours.

It was midnight when we reached the pier. At 12:30 A.M. we finished the preparations for that night's shark fishing and got ourselves into sleeping bags. At six in the morning, the reel's ratchet woke us up. I got up and after checking if the fish had been hooked, I realized that he had stolen the bait and got away. Mondongo asked, "How is it, Tony?"

I said, "It doesn't look good. I think he ran away with the bait."

Flaco said, "Bring the line in, he may be hooked and is running towards us." When I was bringing the line in, all of a sudden I felt I had hooked something very heavy.

I said, "The hook got caught on something heavy, and it is not a fish."

Flaco said, "It could be a bale square grouper!"

Scratching his head Mondongo said, "It could be an old tire or a lobster trap."

I said "It may be a suitcase full of drug money!"

"That would be fantastic," said Mondongo. With a certain difficulty I brought whatever it was, close to the pier. Because it was still dark, we couldn't see what it was. So, Mondongo jumped down from the pier to investigate.

He got a hold of the line and pulled the thing to the water's edge. As fast as flash, he jumped back and said, "Virgin Santisima."

I asked him, "What is the matter?"

He made the sign of the cross on himself and said, "Santo Dios! It is a dead man!"

I said, "Come on, stop fooling around and tell us what

it is."

"I'm telling you the truth. Come down here and have a look." Mondongo and I jumped down from the pier and soon found out that it was a man's corpse. Together we pulled the body out of the water and turned him belly up. The three of us jumped back and said in unison, "Farland?"

"It is Farland all right!" I said, after the moment of shock was passed.

Mondongo asked, "What should we do?"

Flaco said, "We can pick up our stuff and go home, or we can call the police."

"We have to call the police," said I, "this man saved my life."

"Life is nothing!" said Flaco. "Just yesterday, this man a young vibrant life, today he is gone forever."

I said, "I think we are the only people in this town who feel sorry for him."

"I'm worried!" said Mondongo.

"I said, 'About what?'"

"The police are going to question his friends, and they're going to talk about the fights, the stabbing and everything."

"You right man!" said Flaco. "They may suspect we did it!"

"Did what?" I asked.

"The killing of course!" said Mondongo.

Looking at the corpse Flaco said, "It could be an accident."

"I don't think it was an accident," Mondongo said, "it seems like someone bashed his forehead in with a heavy object."

"What are we gonna say if they decide to question us?" asked Flaco.

"We've an alibi!" I said. "We were at the races!"

"All depends on the hour they determine he was

killed!" said Mondongo. "He might have been killed after the races."

I said, "Yesterday, I saw him and Gavilan leaving the dog track. Suarez followed them at a distance."

Flaco said, "One of them could be the murderer."

"Suarez? No way man!" said Mondongo. "He's too good a person to do such a thing!"

"We never know!" I said. "We see his face, not his soul!"

"The main suspect is Gavilan!" said Flaco. "They've had some dealings...and we know that Gavilan is able to kill."

Flaco looked at the deceased and said, "Look! He is holding something in his right." We got closer to Farland to have a look. He had a gold chain with cross and acorn pendants hanging from his closed right fist. Mondongo said, "It seems like there was a fight and in the last moment he grabbed his killer's gold chain." I had seen someone wearing a gold chain like that, but I couldn't remember who it was. I turned to my friends and asked, "Who is going to call the police?" Flaco looking at me said, "Not me, I don't like to talk to policemen."

"Neither do I," said Mondongo. "You go."

I said, "Shit, I always have to do the hard stuff." I went to the phones at the entrance of the pier and dialed 911. The operator said, "Miami Beach Police Department, how may I help you?"

"We just pulled a dead out of the ocean."

She asked, "What is your name?"

"Tony, Tony Miller!"

"Where did it happen?"

"Under the south beach pier," said I.

She said, "Stay there, the police will be with you in a few minutes." In about ten minutes, four patrol cars arrived. Two men in civil clothes approached us and one of them

asked, "Who is Tony Miller?"

"I'm Tony Miller," said I.

"I'm detective Michael Smith, and my partner here is Mr. Luis Herrera."

I said, "Nice meeting you!" Smith was a heavysset man with black hair, salt and pepper sideburns, and a mustache. He also had a visible spare tire in his midsection." I figured his age to be about forty-five. His colleague, Herrera, was a lean and fit twenty-eight year old, about six-feet tall, black hair, and brown eyes. While they are jotting down personal information and what we had seen, I told them what I had observed the night before at the racetrack, the last time I had seen Farland alive. I also called Smith's attention to the gold chain in the deceased's hand.

The crime scene became a beehive of activity. Policemen were going through the routine of looking for clues, photographing the body from different angles, and two divers from the police force were looking for evidence in the bottom of the sea. They took the gold chain from Farland's hand and put it in a plastic bag. A photographer took pictures of a track in the sand that started ten feet away from the water's edge. One of the policeman looking for clues came from under the pier with a piece of lead pipe two and a half feet long and one inch and a half in diameter, and put it in a big plastic bag. At twelve p.m., the police had the body taken away and left the crime scene.

Two weeks later, we were busy fishing when Suarez showed up. I turned around and said, "Hi, Jose, how are you?"

He said, "I'm fine!"

He was wearing the same clothes he had been wearing the night of the crime. It was a brown polo shirt with maroon buttons, navy Levi pants, and tennis shoes. But there was something missing in his wardrobe. He stood there talking to me about the mackerel run, but my mind was racing full

speed. Finally, I remembered what was missing from the wardrobe; he was wearing the night of the crime. I asked him, "Jose, I've to run across the street to buy some stuff. Would you like to fish with my equipment until I come back?"

He said, "Sure, go ahead. I'll wait for you." I ran to the public phones at the entrance of the pier, and dialed detective Smith's number. When the secretary answered, I said, "I've something to say to agent Smith about Bill Farland's death."

"Please wait a minute, I'll connect you with detective Smith." After switching sounds and conversation in the background, the voice on the other end of the line said, "Agent Michael Smith speaking, who are you?"

"I'm Tony Miller. I pulled Bill Farland out of the water. Remember me?"

He said, "Yes, I remember you! What do you want to tell me?"

"I think I know who killed Bill Farland!"

He said, "What makes you think you know who the killer is?" I told him what I had discovered and in ten minutes, he and his partner met me at the pier's extremity. When we arrived, I saw Suarez expression become very somber. Smith told him to join us and asked him, "Are you Jose Suarez?"

"Yes, Sir, I am."

"Mr. Suarez, you know that two weeks ago a man was killed here in the pier?"

Suarez, looking away, said, "Yes, I know."

Smith, looking him in the eye, said, "Where did you spend the night of the crime?"

"I spent the evening at the racetrack."

"When the racetrack closed, where did you go?"

Suarez tentatively said, "I went home where I spent the rest of the night."

The inquisitive eyes of the policeman were constantly studying Suarez's facial reactions. He kept on watching him for a while, then all of a sudden, he asked, "You aren't wearing your gold chain today, did you leave it home?" Suarez's hands instinctively traveled to his neck.

Then he said, "I don't own one."

Smith said, "Mr. Suarez, you have to accompany us to the station. Put your hands on the pier wall and keep your feet apart." Suarez obeyed the order and Smith proceeded to check his pockets. He found a small pocketknife, a few dollars and some loose change in one of his pants' pocket. In the other he found a bundle of one hundred dollar bills. Smith, all of sudden, became excited.

"How much have you here?"

"Five thousand dollars."

"Where did you get all this money?"

Looking away from the policeman's eyes, Suarez said, "It's my life's savings."

"And you carry it with you all the time?"

"I don't trust banks."

Keeping the pressure on, Smith said, "Why don't you leave it home?"

Stuttering, Suarez said, "My landlord has a passkey...I don't trust him!"

Smith signaled his colleague to stay with Suarez, went into the car, and closed the doors. I could see him through the car's windows. I had the impression that he contacted headquarters and was reading the one hundred dollar bill's serial numbers. Twenty minutes later, he stepped out of the car and said, "Mr. Suarez, you are under arrest for the murder of Bill Farland. You've the right to remain silent. If you give up that right, anything you say can be, and will be used against you in a court of law. You have the right to be defended by a lawyer. If you can't afford one, the government will appoint one for you."

Smith put the handcuffs on Suarez, and with the help of his colleague, put him in the police patrol car and it rolled slowly out of the pier."

I saw the news of the arrest in the *Miami Herald* the next day. It said that the police had a signed a confession. They also had Gavilan in custody in connection with the same case. A couple of weeks later, detective Smith called me over the phone and said he wanted to see me. He wanted my testimony recorded and signed. He also asked me to testify in court, when the case would go in front of a judge. I said, "Yes, I'll testify. Now that you have solved the crime, would you please tell me why you were so sure you had your man that day on the pier?"

"No, I can't tell you that before the trial, but I can tell you that yes, I was sure."

I began getting away from the pier and getting closer to Anna. We went together to the movies and concerts. Once in a while we had dinner at the Bayside. The hatred and antagonism I used to harbor in my heart transformed itself into love for Anna. She loved me back passionately.

Jose Suarez was brought to trial for the murder of Bill Farland. He was convicted and sentenced to an eighteen-year jail term. The case was solved so fast because the five thousand dollars found in his possession was money the police had marked up for the sting operation. Jose Suarez found out the transaction was going to take place. He followed Bill Farland and waited in the shadow under the pier; when the undercover agent left, Suarez killed Farland for the money. He used the piece of lead pipe the policeman had found under the pier to deliver the fatal blow to Farland's head.

The police were supposed to arrest Gavilan and Farland after the deal, but the radio of the undercover agent went dead, and the back up policeman lost contact with the

party. On the night of the crime, Gavilan accompanied Farland into the dark to give him the drugs and went back to the racetrack. Since he had nothing to do with the murder, he was only convicted of dealing in drugs.

Two years have passed since those traumatic episodes happened. I'm now working as an apprentice electrician for the city of Miami Beach during the day and going to college at night. Anna and I have plans to get married next year and move away from the beach to an apartment in the suburbs.

Sometimes, I visit the place where Bill died. I think he died, because like me, he was young and naive. Miraculously, I'm still here because he saved my life.



Carlos Escobar "No Trespassing"

Bones

She likes bones
calls them sticks
evokes them like snakes
like Mephistopheles
in the Garden

I throw sticks
bones
at the ground
they lie with
Whitman's hair
dandruffed with
candy rappers
coins
and
condoms

They do not writhe
I can count them
one, two, three moments
magic-less
without charm

Can I learn that trick
in finishing school?

I never
Finish
anything.

Jaycen Elsky



Ian Witlen "Jazz Man"

Featured Poet:

Alexis Cohen

Spoken

As a surprise it is to wake each morning,
take a breath and allow the light to
shift in the stillness, it is even more so
to be touched by you.

The quiet electricity between our ripe palms,
a fluent storm, a graceful language
between two skins spoken in
one bursting native tongue.

Tunneling

There are stranger things than death:
at night, when the earth starts crawling
on its axis knees, the leaves
moving like wet sponges and the scars
of the sun fade under the layers of
moon droppings and the gauze
of settling dust – things are
starting to happen –
afternoon's transmission shifts into night,
the ocean reflecting like plutonium times three
and the almost –infinite horizon surprises the globe.
The heat lifts, an upward fog, with scents of
wet soil and insects being born in
rising water. A palmetto, on its hungry
back, surrenders to the greedy shadows
waving four angry legs. There's a certain
vicinity to this odd darkness, a tubal
blackness, and it is strange – how
the night moves like oriental hair sweeping
a permanence like death under its
recurrent blanket.

Taking Shots in Bars Until I Realized

I am sexy in all the wrong places.
My thighs move move
move like slow blues with
rusted pantyhose that grip but
don't hug all the notes like a woman I
once saw behind microphone and smoke
with midnight and a harmonica.
She was sexy –
because she could sing beyond all
the bourbon shots that straddled tables,
lined up as soldiers leaving for war.
She battled their haze and glazed
eyes, with tones that could bite a chunk
out of my bones. I once saw sexy
in the hands of a stranger, growing slow
up on my leg until it bit me in the ass
when I say how he held a cigarette
between his lips and played the finest
solo I've heard on this side of the
universe. He made it moan, moan
moan – a strange beast that breathed
fire between licks. He kicked and beat
me with this beauty that I cannot be
a part of. I want to be this sexy.
I want to be so sexy that it hurts – like
that time I heard a cello's throttle and
the circumference of the room spun in
neon circles. I grew grew
grew into its belly and listened
in utero to the blood of wood. Each
time the strings are passed over I
am folded more and more into myself
until I'm a strange pocket in the
dressing of each chord.



"Poetry is taking life's simple moments, putting them into words to create and bring forth the emotions essential to human nature."

Watch

There is no such thing as an easy breath;
The ash of stars trickle across night and feel
Time is a harem of hours fawning at death.

Clock hands, indecisive, forgetful, wrench,
And because those hands obsessively reel
There is no such thing as an easy breath.

Twice daily, the pageant passes, all dressed
The same – for funeral or brothel – still wheel
Those black hours fawning at central death.

Whether by an angel's hip-striking hands kept
Or poison arrows to strike the hlf-hour & heel,
There is never such thing as an easy breath.

And that bible-black coven to make man retch
With analog march, shadows stretched, keeps real
Time: the sycophant hours wreathed on death.

Eyes can never tell how many suns are left
By the very lights of dead stars they steal;
There is no such thing as an easy breath
When a harem of hours fawns at my death.



Rebekah D. Laskar "Time in Black & White" (ink wash)

By train or car, over a bridge or through a tunnel, you find yourself completely encircled by giant monuments to man's ingenuity. And then – the shrine. If you're late you can already hear the screams and cheers from thousands of feet away. Amazing how the voice of one man can drown out amongst the clatter of car horns and el-trains, but the voices of fifty-thousand echo powerfully for blocks and blocks. Just before, a smorgasbord of food and trinkets all dedicated to one thing. The pungent yet enticing odors; Sabbret hot dogs, buttery popcorn, steaming peanuts, Their call, it overwhelms. The luke-warm beer for 6 bucks a pop, but this trip isn't made for its thrift.

Like a U.N. meeting, only more cooperative, people of all nations and backgrounds gather in one united building. Giant halls give a sense of ancient Rome. Gladiators preparing – swinging their swords before entering the arena. Brass figures of men long gone across a sea of green stand as tributes to their greatness. They speak to me, taking me back to a simpler day. Suddenly, from over my shoulder, "You're in the wrong seat, buddy. Check your stub."

Maybe

Maybe I'd be happy
If my momma wasn't dead,

Maybe I'm just grateful
that it wasn't me instead.

Maybe I would love her
if she wasn't on the pipe,

Maybe crack was better
than her little baby's life.

Maybe I might love her
in the future I will see,

Maybe not cause
hell, she showed no love to me.

Maybe daddy loves me
In some strange and twisted way,

Maybe should be never
cause he damn sure went away.

Maybe life was better
growing up with family,

Maybe that's a reason
for me to stay happy.

Maybe then they'll understand
just why my head stays bowed,

Maybe cause I'm so confused
I never will be proud.

Maybe I'm not made
to have a normal life,

Maybe I was made
for misery and strife.

Maybe joining the ARMY
has only made things worse,

Maybe the pain in my back
will soon one day disperse.

Maybe I hate people
Just because I feel I should,

Maybe that's just life
at least of what I've understood.

Maybes are just somethings
that you never should begin,

Maybes last forever
cause for me they never end.

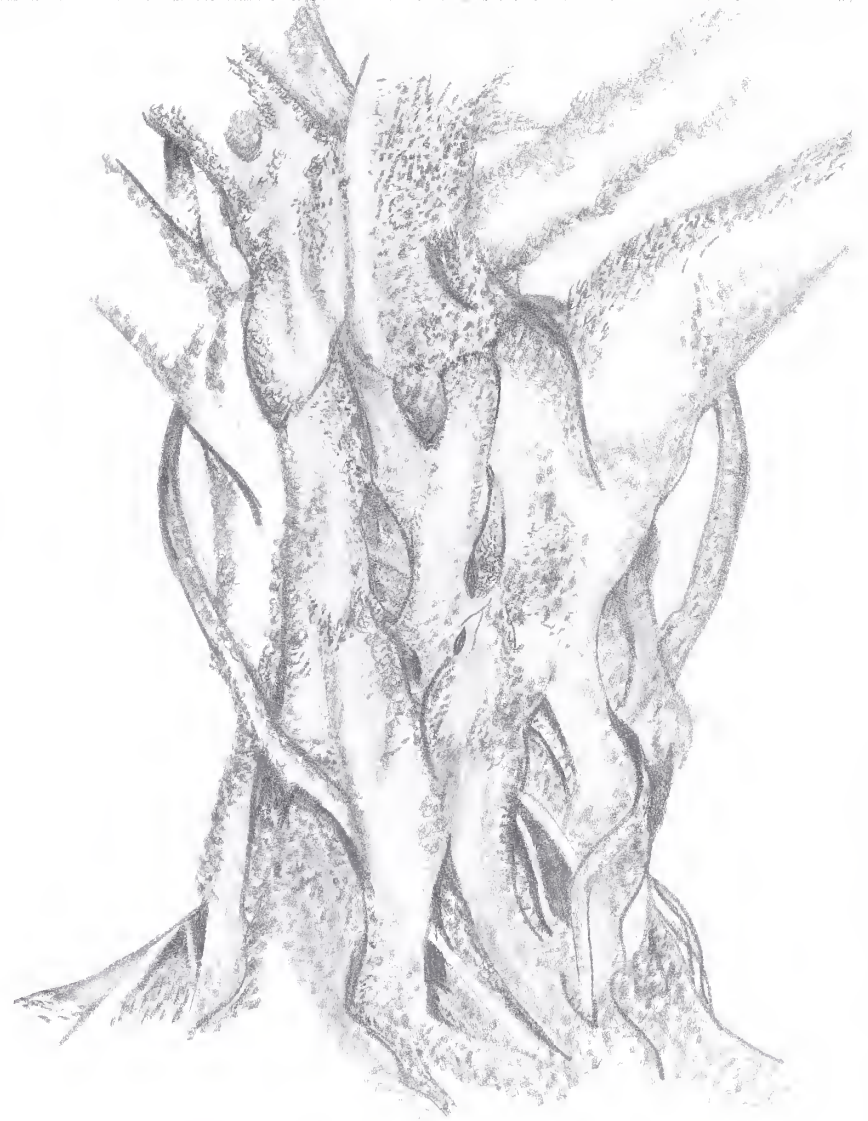
Douglas Jay Harrell "Nature Imitates Art"



Deliberate Birch

Paper peels
White and fluttering
Sheds scraps
With blackened writing
Scratched across its skin
Stark contrast
Crisp flaked edges
Reveal age
Pale over the dark roots
Grown up
Bloodless and frightening
Branches rake across the sky
Talons like wicked lightning carv
A hollow home in the night
Naked against the wind
Point broken fingers
Stab out a cruel summons
Wake the need
To strip bare
To peel clean
To let bleed down to the roots
Each silence
To unravel the masks
To let each hidden moment erupt
Into a flurry of black words
Marks my skin
Etches me free
Ice eats me clean
Numb bones against the wind

Regan Chapman



Selena Laureano "untitled" (Graphite)

Fass

Curiosity killed the cat today
Some say it was the pigs
Others say it was one of it's own
But I saw them lay the trap.
I saw curiosity kill the cat.

All gathered to see what had conspired.
The pigeons informed the cats,
And the cats told their dogs
Some were remorseful, others satisfied
But still all bewildered.

At that very spot where he lay still
Was not the spot where he took his last breath.
It happened not more than five blocks away
On his street, took place his death

Load murmurs and soft echoes crept into the young cats ear
Entwined in passion –two had been– and the young cat found himself there
A third party arrived;
With hate in his eyes.
A shot of copper released in the air
I know so well, for I was standing near.

It landed, wedged in some spot, as bullets often do
It hit a target, it was not meant to.

Yellow borders and pigs barricaded the scene
A weapon of vengeance caused such a bad deed
I stood quietly and observant as friends and family mourned
Still, only I know it's curiosity that has them torn.

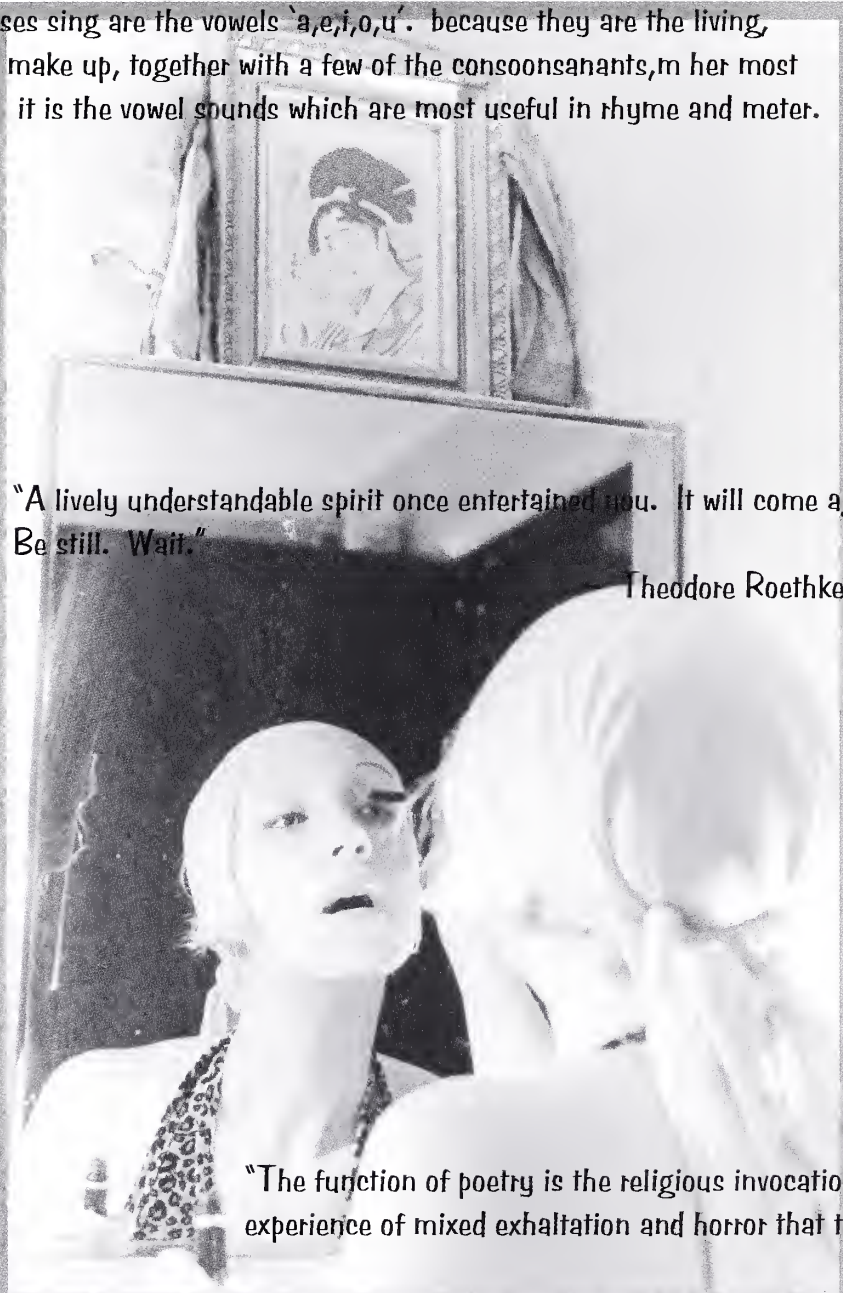
the five things which make the muses sing are the vowels 'a,e,i,o,u'. because they are the living, resonant part of the alphabet, they make up, together with a few of the consonants, in her most secret and unpronounceable name. it is the vowel sounds which are most useful in rhyme and meter.

"A lively understandable spirit once entertained you. It will come again.
Be still. Wait."

Theodore Roethke

"The function of poetry is the religious invocation of the Muse, its use is the experience of mixed exaltation and horror that the presence excites"

~ Robert Graves



Jaimie Elta Tibble "Behind the Trailer Park"





Treading Lightly

Kim Kopf

Whitney Delaney...murdered. She was found lying on her bed in her nightgown with a single gunshot wound to the chest. The newspaper story hits me like a bucket of water, waking me up and making me shake my head. I think it is the image of her in her nightgown. Thomas Delaney, who had recently reconciled with Ms. Delaney, was found in the bathroom with a gunshot wound to the head. Just another murder-suicide, I think. An epidemic.

There is no picture in the paper, but I have a picture in my mind. This woman is clothed in sheer white cotton, resting in the most comfortable place in her home, lying on her back, arms outstretched. Her heart is blown apart.

As I read on, this woman's name keeps waving to me, until I recognize her - Whitney Delaney. I gasp, hand to my mouth, eyes wide in disbelief. I am seeing a familiar ghost.

Whitney...could it be the same woman I had known? I once had a student who bears the same first name as the famous singer/actor who married "bad boy" Bobbie Brown. I play this association game to remember the names of my students. Her last name rhymes with the first, but it just misses. Maybe I am wrong.

I search for my spiral notebook. I teach many swim classes at the YMCA, but I only keep personal record of the private lessons. Most of my students are children, but some are adults. They have dreams of mastering a whole New World that lies within the water. Left thumb on the outside of the pages, I start at the back of the notebook and flip forward.

I see the name, *Beth Myers*. She was a muscular young woman who wanted to improve her strokes to be able to exercise in the pool as well as the gym.

Oh, yes. There is old man, *William Boyle*, who went by

"Bill". He was 69 years old and a fast learner. He mastered the crawl stroke, the elementary backstroke, the sidestroke, and treading water all in the eight-week session. I remember Bill. He came to see me a month after his last lesson. I was on the pool deck putting away kick boards, eager to be heading home for the night. Bill stopped me.

"Hello, Ms. Kim." His grin made the skin around his eyes wrinkle that much more. "I just want you to know how you have helped me begin a new life." He winked. "I bought a boat." Bill shook my hand, but I felt he would have hugged me if I had not been skimpily clad in my red swimming tank.

Trina Hall never made it past the second swim lesson. She was a stunning black woman whose stern father had told her all her young life, "Don't go near the water or you're gonna drown." With goosebumps on 90-degree days, Trina would grip the ledge at the 3-foot end of the pool, shaking like the flags strung over the top of us. She did not go beyond bubble blowing, as she was afraid to put her eyes in the water. I never saw her again.

I sit down as I see *Whitney Delaney* in my handwriting. *Needs to pass swim test for Police Academy*, I had written. I taught her to swim two years ago. I bow my head holding my forehead in my fingertips as if to channel the memories deep in my head.

I stood on the concrete deck of the Ft. Lauderdale YMCA pool, ready to begin the final swim lesson of the day. It was March and the sky would be dark within the hour. Not many people sign up for swimming classes in winter at the outdoor pool. I was wondering if my private lesson would even show. The pool was heated, but the air was cool.

"Hi." Whitney was a nice-looking, African-American woman with a friendly smile. She was wearing a modest one-piece, green floral bathing suit. "Are you Ms. Kim?"

I knew it was obvious with the whistle around my neck and clipboard in my hand. I simpered and nodded.

"You know, Ms. Kim, if I can learn to swim I can be promoted at the station and make more money. I hope you can help me."

"Money? That's quite the incentive to do well in my class. Most of my other students just get stickers. Whatever motivates you, I'm for it." I notice her full lips wear a fresh application of bright lipstick.

"I need to be able to swim 200 yards and tread water for five minutes. Do you think I will be able to do it?"

"I am always amazed at how quickly adults learn to swim," I answer.

She clutched a basic white bathing cap. "Will my hair get wet?"

"Uhhh, most definitely." I bit my lip from wanting to laugh. *It is a valid question coming from a new comer*, I said to myself. I told her, "Swimming involves putting the face in the water and getting the whole head wet. Can you do it?" I wanted to know point blank what I was up against.

"Oh, sure. I can do anything you tell me to. I need this promotion. You know, I do go in the pool at my apartment complex. I just have never been in over my head before."

As she descended the pool steps, she tugged at the bottom of her swimsuit in an attempt to cover her feminine hips.

What a brave woman, I thought, *coming here half-naked and putting herself at the mercy of a stranger to make a better life.*

I had no idea how right-on was my first impression.

She was a typical inexperienced adult at lesson one. I placed the instructional Styrofoam swim bar under her armpits and told her to kick. Her first attempt made her travel backwards. After she had played around with the movement of her legs, she discovered what worked and was soon chugging along at a snail's pace. I wasn't worried about her weak kicking technique. Whitney had a strong upper body, no doubt as part of her policewoman training.

By the fourth or fifth lesson, she was putting it all together and swimming the length of the pool. I told her, "This freestyle stroke requires eighty percent upper body work. You're a natural. 200 yards is only four laps. You won't have a problem as long as you don't try to swim too fast, too soon and get tuckered out."

"I never thought I would even get *this* far," she enthuses. "You know, I am so excited, I can hardly wait to wake up each morning."

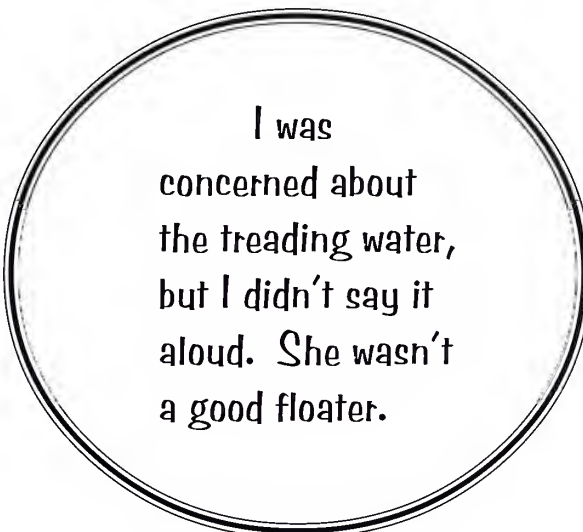
I was concerned about the treading water, but I didn't say it aloud. She wasn't a good floater.

"Like I tell the kids, be an airplane." I demonstrate with my arms stretched out to the sides. She copies my actions. "Now lie back on top of the water like it's your bed."

Whitney eventually is able to hold the float for a few seconds, but the weight of her legs pulls her under.

"Whitney, it's because you have very lean, muscular legs. Be grateful. Fat is what floats."

"Oh, dear!" She exclaimed. "You mean I should stop



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working out?" She tries again to float like an airplane and once again, she is gradually pulled under the water, feet first.

"What's a girl to do?" She joked, "These darn thighs. I can't float with 'em and can't get a man without 'em."

I laughed deep into the pit of my belly. It was dusk and all I could see were her sparkling eyes and her crescent of white teeth. The rest of her was beginning to fade into the dark sky.

One of our classes was cut short. The wind was blowing and our thin blood could handle the chill for only so long. We were working on treading water without success. Coaching her to lean forward or back did not work. She needed to relax, not overwork her arms and legs. I gave her different leg movements to try, like the eggbeater, whip kick, scissors kick, everything. "Everyone has their own treading water technique. With experience, you find what works best for keeping you afloat." It was not happening that night.

"Let's get out of here!" she shouted.

We ran for our towels and in unison, chimed, "The hot tub."



Ankela Miranda "Untitled"

Just inside the Y's locker room was the hot tub. As we entered, the bubbling water stung my cold, pale skin, and I envied Whitney's ample and strong physique compared to my spare one. We sank into the heat, soaking and talking like friends. She had one daughter, 11, the same age as mine.

What was her name? I turn back to the newspaper article and all it says is *they leave behind a 13-year-old daughter*, as if her parents went on a trip or something. Now the name comes to me—*Tiffany, like the lamp.*

"Does Tiffany swim?" I wanted to know.

"Oh, yes. I made sure she learned at camp. I want her to have more than I had growing up. I separated from my husband, you know, mainly because it was best for Tiffany. But... you know? I am beginning to see that it has been the best thing for *me*. I have a great group of friends at the station. We call each other and go out and do things. I was never *ever* able

to do anything with him at home. And here I am learning to

swim like I have never done before. And if I get this promotion, I can do patrol work... life is good."

On the night of Whitney's last lesson, I had to bring my daughter, Kelly, to work. She entertained herself in the deep end of the pool for nearly an hour while Whitney and I continued to work on treading water in the 5-feet. "Just tell yourself in your mind, *stay in one spot and keep my head up, keep my head up...* If you put it in your mind, the body will follow."

"You know..." Whitney's voice trailed off as she gazed at Kelly in the deep end. "I wish I could go in the deep water."

"You will, once you learn to tread," I said trying to be an encouraging coach. "It helps to learn things young, but the only difference between Kelly and you is practice. You'll get it with practice."

I knew she couldn't afford endless sessions and she would be on her own from then on. It was up to her.

Sadness came over me when I said goodbye to my new friend, especially since I felt the job was not complete. She thanked me and I wished her luck. The chlorine smell was strong and I called to her one last time, "You can do it," while watching her disappear into the building.

Family members reveal Ms. Delaney had filed for divorce from her husband of 15 years and Mr. Delaney was distraught. There is no picture of the murderer, but I picture him with no brains, head in the toilet.

A sense of guilt bloats me. *I should never have let her go until she learned to stay in one spot and keep her head up.*

I reread the article, searching for answers, but I only came up with more questions. I am angry with the reporter for leaving out important details I feel desperate to know. What made her go back to him? She was doing well on her own. Why would she let him back in her home? Had she passed her swim test? Did she get the promotion?

And what of Tiffany, the daughter who they named after a lamp?

Louise Orcini "Powerful Dream" (Mixed Media)



The Other Night Bleeds Into Tomorrow

moving in slow motion
tormenting the raindrops
beating down on my brain
abused in the blink of an eye
the twitch of a cock
unable to confront these friendly expectations
securely attached to male egos
pronounced dramatically in perverse actions
thoughts dematerialize before I blink
my heart heavy, drenched
soaked in pain
tears hidden behind my wall
highly electrified with stupidity and hope
ignorant little girl
they use you for sport
amusement for their pleasure
you are their toy
inhuman creature made to fulfill
their lust and desire
and in the end
you disappear little girl
out of sight
out of mind
out of control
desperate to cling on to hope
on to what you wish was there
little girl
go home
go away
go to sleep

Hard Life

gypsy player
cradling her worth like a golden tiara
intangible sunrise shining through the midnight moon
a façade through and through
thoroughly enticed by the engorged sight
slipping behind closed doors
to engage in its superb acts
of pleasurable indulgence
the incest acts bring flavorful misdemeanors
as cold steal breaks warm hot hands
free of their constraints
freedom from middle class life
of Mercedes and lattes
criminally neglected shadows
from five bedroom six bathroom shanty towns
pissing in gold toilets filled with bottled water
seeping through their Jack Daniels skin
drunk on light running high on martinis
olive soaked eyes lavish in heated swimming pools
for poor souls live hard lives
in middle class hell



In Passing

Time twisted born on firefly wings
dusting Earth in speckled radiance.
Amorphous insulation spreading –
coating the Earth in surreptitious splendor.

Axis spinning, a glittering translucent sphere
bringing about a circuitous route
to form the cycle from which springs
the core creating root of time

The cogs start to spin
The wheel begins to turn
The circling hourglass of Earth.

Fallen ness

As we enter the scene where lights are few,
everyone there is in the mood.
It's funny how things look better in the dark.
We take our drinks, we hide behind our masks.
We dance, pleasure fills our lives
and all the wicked things we try.
Looking at our watches,
we pray for no one to turn on the lights.
Temptation runs through our bodies,
everyone there knows it.
When it's dark, all the wrongness we do is not bad.
Then our sins become alive with the lights.
We hide our dirty hands behind our backs.
Trying to feel alive, emptiness is all we find.
Another night has gone by.
The sun shines on us,
we pretend not to know that side.

Daniel W. Butler

Jeanneth Gomez

The Quiet Dust

Bury me not in the quiet dust
Where the shadow of memory
Stretches long in the afternoon sun

Cast me not into the forge of
Endless oblivion where neither
Hope or darkness drift
Or tears shall ever fall

Hold me close better
In the clasps of your heart
So that the song we sang
Together may vibrate
Through your chambers endlessly

Carry me upon your vibrant curves
To the peak of each new moment
Where my words will echo
Inside of your lyrical dance

Lock me my love within yours
So that I may feel every heartbeat
Every pulse shared and
Our souls be joined together

Wear me now gently
Upon life's gossamer path
Rejoicing each ticking
Sounding sound

Forget me soon
In the quiet dust
That lies motionless

Remembering only
How much
I loved you



Mutha's Day

Ryan Deering

It was a cold day—that damp cold you get during January in Jersey that makes your lips feel frozen after you lick them. The kind of cold that makes a runny nose feel like a stone with icicles hanging off. He knew he had to hurry because if he didn't get some dope soon he would start throwing up. A dope-sick throw up is bad enough, but the cold would make it all the worse. He sat there in his car with a busted heater, wishing he hadn't already hocked his guitar. "Where the fuck am I gonna find some loot?," he thought to himself, knowing that he had already expended the usual round of people he could grub off of.

The words went through his mind as often as most men think about sex, "I need to get fuckin straight," followed by, "I should' a never started doin this shit." But the latter thought he had only when he was out, when the sickness started kicking in. There was Stephanie from the video store who was a sucker for his blue eyes and rough edged charm, but she probably wasn't even up yet. He liked her, he really did. But heroin had his heart, and there wasn't much room for anyone else. At this point, after 5 years of fighting a losing battle with the drug, he was all out of hope. The white flag had gone up. This was his life now and he was going to make damn sure that he did it the best he could.

Not all of his schemes were used up though, not even close. Being a junkie had become a full time job, and with experience one learns newer and faster ways of doing things. Today was Mother's Day, and Mike knew there were opportunities abound. This wasn't the Mother's Day with flowers and chocolates that comes along every May, but the one that comes along on the first of every month when Welfare, SSI, disability, and HUD mail out their checks. This was the day when dealers make the most, junkies spend the most, and cops arrest the most, but none of this mattered to Mike until he got something into his system.

There were a few older pill junkies in town that he used to keep his habit going. Mike was no drug dealer, but he would get things for people who were either too smart or too scared to get it for themselves. Shelly was one of these pill-heads that gave him 60 dollars for 2 ten-dollar bags, and he was hoping she'd be in need today. He rang her bell with high hopes, but after one look in her eyes he knew that she was in no need of any more chemical assistance today. Perhaps out of courtesy, or perhaps out of desperation, he decided to give it a shot anyway.

"Hey, Shelly, what's up?"

"Nothin, you?"

"You aint doin nuttin today?"

"Naa," she replied, then whispering, "*I got my script filled.*"

Mike whispered back, "*Aww, you gotta hook me up. I'm really illin.*"

Her voice got loud as she heard her husband walking over, "Uuu naw Mike, I don't know where Jimmy is right now."

"OK, Mrs. Russo, tell'em I stopped by ok?"

"OK, Mike, Bye bye—*Try back with me on Friday.*"

"Yeah, take it easy."

"What a bitch," he thought. She knew what he was feeling and she had pills to spare. He would've liked to call her a bitch right to her face and tell her husband that his lovely suburbanite wife was nothing but a junkie. But then again, she was a valuable resource, good for 2 or 3 fixes a week at least. Then there came another of those thoughts that popped-up enough to compete with the male libido, "This shit should just be legal. I should be able to walk into a drug store and buy it." Mike was somewhat jealous of the pill-heads for the fact that they didn't have to risk as much as he did. He hated being nice to them too. They were all such fake and conniving liars. That was one of the biggest things he hated about being a dope fiend, the lying part. He use to

pride himself in being one of those guys that would tell people like it is, but now he had to kiss ass to get 20 bucks out of someone. He could do it easily with the dope in his system, but he was running on empty right now and it got to him.

He tried a few more of the pill-heads, but along the way he noticed Stephanie's car in the video store parking lot. Stephanie really liked him a lot, and he knew it, but heroin is a hard lady to compete with. Mike wondered to himself if he was starting to use her for money too often, and this was another of the situations he hated lying in when he was straight. He could do it so damn good though; he was the ultimate salesman. But he didn't have anything in his system now and he was worried that some kinks might show through his armor. But nonetheless, he put his game face on and went to work.

"Hey, girl, how you doin'?"

"Hi, Mike, what happened to you last night?"

"Aaa, you know, band practice and shit. I was tired as hell by da time we got finished."

"When are you guys playing again?"

"Thursday night at Cricket Club, you comin, right?"

"Of course, all of us will."

"Damn, you's are sellin everything in here now; cigarettes, groceries, subs. I'd be hungry as hell if my stomach wasn't hurtin so bad."

"Aww, that sucks. What's wrong with your stomach?"

"Shit, I dunno. You don't have no Pepto or nuttin do ya?"

"Not here I don't. I can loan you a few bucks to get some if you want though."

"Really?"

"Sure."

"Damn, thanks. I appreciate dat shit. I'll get you back for it too—don't know *when* exactly, but you'll get it outta me one way or da utha."

"Don't worry about it—you don't have to pay me back."

"Hey, I hate to ask, but I'm like runnin on E too. Think you could spot me like 20 bucks so I can get gas too?"

"Oh, Mike, I would, but I only have a 10."

"What about the regista?"

"No way, I can't do that again. I almost got caught last time."

"Damn, I'm fucked den."

"I'm sorry Mike, I *really* can't though."

"Naw, I understand. I'm just tryin to think where I can get a few more bucks."

"Oh, fuck it. I'm gonna be quittin this job soon anyway."

"Are you sure?"

"Yeah, it's cool."

"Damn, you're da best girl. You don't know how much I appreciate dis shit."

"No problem, just don't go spending it on drugs or anything, OK?"

"Naw, I stopped doin'at shit. I just go to da clinic now."

"You swear?"

He paused for a moment, looking at her with a revealing smile and said, "C'mon, dis is me you're tawkin to."

"I know—*that's* why I'm asking."

"Haha, yeah right. Hey, I gotta get goin, I'll give ya a call later."

"Ok, don't forget."

"I won't—see ya."

"Bye—be good."

"Always."

Now Mike was in business. Pretty soon he wouldn't feel any more guilt about lying to people and using them. He couldn't help but wonder if he should turn Stephanie on to

dope, knowing that she would provide a great source of drug money if she were doing it too. He would even go as far in his mind as to tell himself that she might not get hooked, before realizing, "Yeah, right! She'd be sellin her ass in a minute." Everyone he knew got hooked eventually, just like he did. "I should'a never started this shit," came to thought again, "so why the heck would I get a nice chick like her into this?" But there was money in Mike's pocket and dope to be had; no time to concern himself with some chick.

This is what made it all worth it: the search, the score, the rush, the forgetting. There was almost a "pre-high" to getting dope. There was an almost overwhelming excitement in knowing what was about to come. It was hot out there that day—as hot with cops as the air was cold. He was a little worried about the notion of copping on the east end. It was full of stick-up kids and the dope wasn't as good. Besides, he knew everyone out here. There is a definite comfort in familiarity, especially when it comes to criminal activities. He threw up twice on the way, turning the five-minute drive into 15. And he started to sweat in 20-degree weather. But this was nothing new to Mike. Even this was part of that comfortable familiarity. Finally, he saw someone he knew other than a cop and knew he would be straight in a matter of minutes.

"Yo! Nakia! Whassup man?"

"Hey, Mike man, you gotta come back later. Too many po-lice out here right now."

"Aww man, lemme just get 2 real quick man. I'm sick as a dawg, throwin' up and shit."

"Aight, circle da block dough."

"Aight."

Mike hated when dealers wanted him to circle the block. He had been given fake drugs like that a few times before, but this was Nakia—a friend, or at least the drug addict equivalent to one—and Nakia wouldn't risk losing him as a customer. Just as he started to drive on he heard,

"YOOO!"

"WHAT?"

"2 RIGHT?"

"YEAH."

"OK."

"GIMME 5 MINUTES."

"AIGHT."

Five minutes doesn't seem like a very long time, but when someone's dope sick and seeing cops around every other corner, it might as well be five hours. The minutes were starting to feel too long to Mike and he was getting ready to try another spot when he saw Nakia coming out of the brick apartment buildings. He gave a quick look around for cops, pulled over and asked, "This shit is good right?"

"Yeah, man, you know I don't play."

"As good as that 'Die Hard' shit right?"

"Better. This shit called '9 and a half plus.' It's da bomb."

"Aight man, you gonna be out later?"

"Yeah, till like 9."

"Aight, later man."

"Peace."

Now there was only one obstacle between Mike and his dope, and that was a place to get off. He thought of a Burger King lot nearby but opted for a coin-op car wash nearby that was usually empty. "Where the hell did I put it?" he questioned, remembering it was stashed far inside the wires of his dashboard. He pulled out his spoon, blacked the bottom from being burned over and over, with a white pasty coating on the top. Tying the spoon and needle together was an old tie-off shoelace with a few spots of blood that would drip on the tie when a good shot would leave him too incapacitated to even wipe the dripping blood. And finally the needle, which was a small _ cc diabetic type hypodermic with a dull, blackened tip from being burned

when it would occasionally clog. Of course, there was always a bottle of water in his car for this moment, but that was just left out. These were the tools of his trade, and he knew them well. And now came the moment that this had all been for. The dope had been poured, the water added and boiled, the needle filled, and now—the shot. He let out a long, “mmm,” as the plunger went down. This dope was good and he wanted to savor the moment. In that one instance, all his troubles lifted away. The warmest, most comfortable feeling Mike knew enveloped his whole body like a blanket, drowning out the cold air. This was the feeling—the thing that made it all seem worth it. This is the reason that junkies do what they do, steal what they steal, and lie when they lie. He began to feel himself drift into a nod—an almost whimsical state that gave him a floating, restful feeling. For an instance, he brought himself back to re-stash his set and toss the empty bags. The next 20 minutes were pure ecstasy until he heard a, “knock, knock, knock!” on the window. A bit stunned, he came out of it saying, “Wha, who?”

“Sir! Are you OK sir?”

“Huh? O, yeah,” he said while rolling down the window, “Is something wrong?”

“Well, you tell me, someone called because you were passed out here. We’re just making sure you’re OK.”

“Oh, yeah, I’m OK. I pulled in here cause my car was overheatin and I musta dozed off.”

“Dozed off, huh? You don’t have any drugs or anything in the car do you?”

“No, sir.”

“Do you mind if I take a look?”

He thought to himself, “Mind? Of course I mind you asshole, but if I say no you’re gonna have your ass in here anyway aint you? Prick!” Of course what he actually said was, “No sir, I don’t mind.” The cop made him stand at the back of the car. He’d been through this before, and knew all to well what it was like for the cop to turn to him with his

gun out and yell, “Get down on your knees and cross your legs!” But today he was just a little wiser than the police—well, more like lucky. But he thought it was because of some sort of “junkie skill” he had developed. The set was stashed where most searches wouldn’t find it, and the empty bags weren’t in the car. Even still, in the state he was in he knew he could have easily forgotten something. But after a few minutes of pulling everything out of the car the cop said,

“This car’s pretty dirty, what are you living in it or something?”

“No, sir, just lazy I guess.”

“Well, this is private property. Next time take a nap at home, ok?”

“Haha, ok officer, no problem—I don’t even know what happened. I remember thinkin’ that I’d just rest my eyes for a second and next thing I know, I’m hearin’ knockin’ on my window.”

“Yeah, it happens. Oh, and your inspection sticker was due last month. I’m just gonna give you a warning now but you’ve got to take care of that.”

“Oh shoot, I didn’t even realize. I’ll get that done tomorrow.”

“OK, then, drive safely.”

“All right officer, have a nice day.”

Mike let out a big sigh of relief as he watched that cop car pull out of the lot. Kicking dope wasn’t any fun *anywhere*, and all the worse in jail. He’d have to be more careful about that spot, maybe not use it for a while. But either way, he was in a groove now, and this was the time when he could really go out and hustle up some money. Like a cheetah after a fresh kill, Mike knew he had little time to rest before starting out on the next hunt. At least now, with his “groove on” the task didn’t seem quite as daunting.

Heroin had that effect on Mike. It wasn’t just the chase and the rush, but the high afterward that gave him a sense of distance from the world around him. It didn’t start out as an

escape from everything, or a tool to remove him from his guilt. It was an escape alright, but an escape from the mundane duties of menial living. Of course, there were childhood scars and lost loves he was running from, but feelings that true success were out of reach, and potential was unfulfilled, were the true driving forces behind the needle. Mike didn't know *any* of this though, and wouldn't have cared either way—all he knew was he felt good for now and he didn't want it to end.

Mike's thoughts turned to a friend, a drug buddy. Even in his addiction Mike had a generous side to him, and he had been giving his friend Keith free dope 2 or 3 times a week for over a month now. Keith had been telling him all along that he'd ante up when his SSI check came, and this was mother's day—the first of the month—time to, "pay the piper."

It didn't take him long to find Keith. He basically just followed the route he would've walked to cash his check and buy dope. He saw him walking down the street and was happy too see that he was already wasted. Some people—Mike included—could hide their dope high well, but someone that knew what to look for could see Keith was high from a mile away. At first Mike thought, "Cool, now I don't have to drive his ass to the spot," but when he saw that he was walking with Eddie, his excitement turned into concern. Keith's father had died of an overdose when Keith was in grade school, and Eddie was a 50-year-old junkie. This, combined with the fact that Keith was clinically depressed, drove him to view Eddie as some sort of father figure. Mike couldn't understand why Keith actually looked up to this dirty, scumbag of a man, but he did recognize it. As he walked over to them he thought to himself, "He better not be hookin' his ass up when I been takin' care a him every other fuckin day," but then he just walked over nonchalantly, "What's up Keith, how you doin? Sup' Eddie?"

"Hey, Mike."

"You still got that piece a junk runnin' huh?"

"Yeah, barely. So what's goin on Keith?"

Keith answered in a half-slurred voice, "Nothin, just getting cigarettes."

"Yeah, right, this is me man, your high as hell."

"Naw, I had a little left this morning but that's it."

"Yeah, Mike, we didn't get anything."

"Don't bullshit me old man. I'm still ready to beat your ass for sellin' my shit when I was in jail."

"I know, but I didn't get any money yet."

"Yeah, ok, whateva. Just don't sit here lyin' to my face and shit. See this fawhead? Do you see the word stupid tattooed on it?"

"No, Mike, really. I didn't get my check today. Eddie got some money off of Joanne and we just got 2 bags."

"Look, man, I'm getting *really* pissed. You're my boy and all, but I been hookin you up all fuckin month and if you don't stop bullshittin' me you're gonna be tastin' concrete in about 15 seconds."

"I know you been hooking me up, and I'm *gonna* get you back as soon as I get my check."

Mike knew he was lying. He also knew about Keith and Eddie, but he was still stunned that Keith would try to screw him over like this. He tried to give himself a reason not to beat the crap out of Keith, but just then, he noticed the corner of a check stub sticking out of Keith's jacket pocket. He snatched it out of his pocket, noticing it was a clean, new stub and said, "You lyin fuckin prick, nobody plays me like that!"

"No, Mike wait...Uhh...I didn't...Stop!"

"Yeah, that's right you fuck (cracking sound of fist to jaw). Nobody fucks with me!"

(Fight goes on, Keith mounts very little resistance, and after about 30 seconds he's on the ground—bloody and semiconscious)

"Stop it, Mike, you'll kill'em."

"Back off, old man, I'll beat your ass too."

"Ok, ok, but he's got 2 bundles in his pocket and if cops come we're all screwed."

"He's got 2 bundles huh? Correction, *I've* got two bundles. And what's this? Aaa, a freshly cashed check. Thanks, Keith, I knew you'd get me back." Then Mike yelled, "Prick!" before spitting on Keith for good measure.

"I'm callin' the cops man, you better get outta here."

"Yeah, whateva, you gonna tell the cops what? 'officer, go get 'em, he stold my drugs.' Hahaha, yeah right."

"Well, you can't keep doin' stuff like this, it's gonna come back to you some day."

"Yeah? Well when that day comes I'll let'chya know. Later scumbag."

Mike *really* didn't want to lump Keith up like that, but he hated being lied to, especially by someone that was supposed to be a friend. He didn't remorse over it too long though—he had two bundles in his pocket who's calling was much louder than that of his guilt. "Two fuckin bundles, hell yeah! I'm a be fucked up tonight," he thought. It wasn't as if this was the most dope he'd ever had, but this was a damn good score, maybe even enough to keep him straight for a few days and find a real job. He wondered if he should sell some of it, "Yeah, maybe them dumb kids up in Netcong, them dumb asses be givin me like 25-30 bucks a pop for dis shit." He drove around in his car to find another spot he could get off at, imagining himself as some kind of grandiose drug dealer. After opting for a Mobil gas station bathroom and putting 3 bags in the cooker, his high flying thoughts were focused on just finding a place to sleep.

When it came to sleeping, he had few options. There were some friends here and there that would let him crash, but he was real careful about wearing out his welcome. He could always sleep in his car, but he didn't look forward to waking up shivering or catching pneumonia. Hell, in this kind of cold he could have easily frozen to death, and that's

not even considering being woken up and searched by cops in the middle of the night—not a pretty picture considering the 2 bundles. So tonight it would be option C: find a girl to hook up with for the night. There was a dancer girl named Jenn that never turned him away, especially when he was holding. But then he thought, "Naa, fuck Jenn, I aint messin with that crack whore." Mike didn't like girls like Jenn. He's a guy and all, so basically anything that shook a little T-n-A in his face was fare game. But still, regardless of his own shortcomings, Mike liked girls that had a little depth to them, and somewhere in the back of his mind there was probably some kind of hope that the right girl would come along and "rescue" him from himself. He probably would've missed being able to come home to his own bed, or take a shower with his own washcloth, but the dope made it all OK, even if only for a little while. It was getting late though, and all the dope in the world didn't stop his worrying about where he was going to sleep, and pretty soon most people would be home in bed and he'd be screwed. Then he remembered Stephanie, "Yeah, Steph. She'll probably want me to crash with her, but damn, I don't know if her mom lets her have guys stay over and shit." She was just closing up the video store as he pulled up.

"Hey, Steph, told ya I'd come back."

"Wow, Michael O'Neil keeping his word? I can't believe it."

"Aww, c'mon, I ain't that bad, am I?"

"No, I'm just kiddin. Hey are you OK? You look wasted."

"Naw, I'm cool, just took a couple a xanax, makes the meth kick in and shit. You goin' out or anything?"

"Out? Yeah right, I'm too broke to go out."

"Yeah, I know the feeling."

"No, I'm just gonna take home *Chasing Amy* and make some popcorn."

"*Chasing Amy*? Sounds like a big-time chick flick."

"No, it's funny. You should come watch it with me."

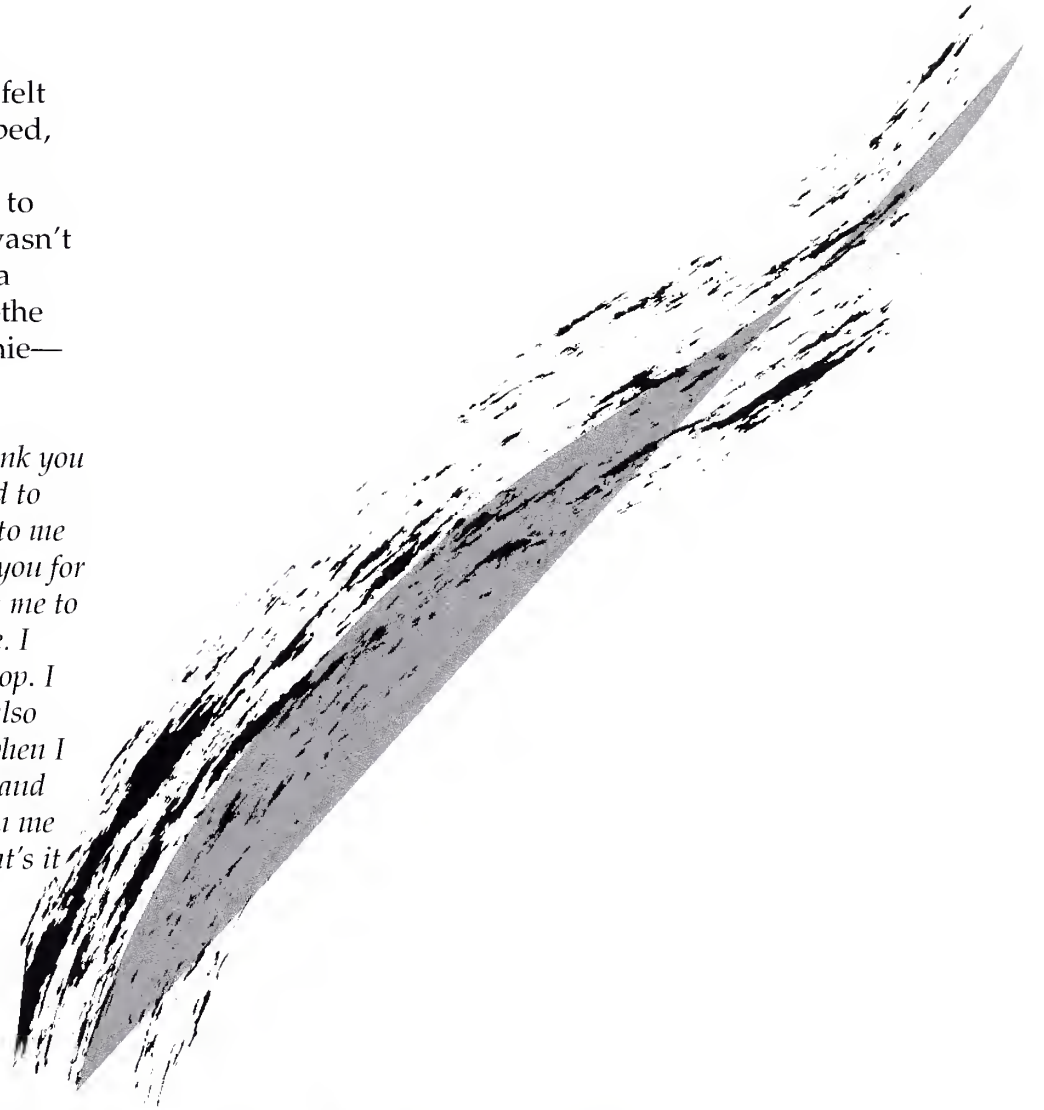
Mike let out another of his revealing smiles, with much more on his mind than popcorn, and said, "Hmm, you make your popcorn with real butter?"

"For you? Sure, real butter."

"Well in that case, I can't resist."

Even though he had one less person on the ever shortening list of people he could call his friends, Mike felt he'd had a good day. He was going to sleep in a warm bed, with a warm girl, and he had a wake up shot for the morning. One of the worst feelings for a junkie is going to sleep knowing that you would wake up sick, but that wasn't the case that day. So after food, a shower, a movie, and a blowjob, Mike decided to call it a night. One last shot—the third of the day for Mike, the first of her life for Stephanie—and it was time for Mike to say goodnight to God.

God, I know I'm not supposed to thank you for this, but I thank you that I got all that stuff from Keith today; I am sorry that I had to use violence though. I thank you that Stephanie was so good to me today and I pray that she won't get hooked like I am. I thank you for keeping me alive and out of jail today. I know you don't want me to do drugs and all God, but I don't know if I can stop any more. I guess if you really want me to, than you'll make it so I can stop. I thank you that I don't have to sleep in my car tonight, but I also thank you that I even have a car, because it was a lot worse when I didn't have one. I pray for my family God, that they're all ok and stuff. I understand why they don't wanna hear anything from me till I get my act together, but I still miss'em. Well, I guess that's it God, help keep me alive tomorrow God, amen.



Winter of Nightmares

She fell through as the dream gave way to drowning
Twenty thousand beats dry out the heart's valves
She turns around to see endless stretches and no doors
Each step breaks the ice into more and more fractures
but it refuses to give way – that would be the easy way out.
Outside the dream, behind the door to her room,
he feels the vibrations of her subconscious screams.
He picks up on these dreams so well it's mechanical as
he places his hands on the door, palms out and open,
ready to give themselves in exchange for her.
The ice shards make no move but somehow they find
their way into her heart, replacing the old ones that cleaved
to the halls of her veins and melted away to her core.
Like memories they drift away but a part of them lingers
The nicks and stains and cracks are mended, but no matter
how often they are mended she stays the same.
No matter how often he reaches out and draws her in
from the winter of nightmares, the porcelain paint on her stays.
He wonders how to put her back together, but she's always
believed that she was built more from the glue than from the pieces.

Michelle Becker

Diane Larson

Gypsies

You'd better watch out or we'll sell you to the gypsies, my mother would say. This time for eating candy off the ground. I'd left dirty licorice in the pocket of my Sunday coat. I wouldn't have minded. Grandma was Bohemian. I could be a belly dancer, half-naked, learn to shimmy, shake, put a spell on kids who beat on me. The germs didn't hurt me, but the belt did. In an hour I went out to play, looked left and right down the alleyway and saw the horse-drawn cart and its peddler who sharpened knives, mended pots, calling out something I couldn't understand. Housewives in house dresses came to greet him, wearing aprons and babushkas. I wanted to ride off in his wagon. The gypsy's horse wore blinders, but Mother stayed away and so did I.

Lauren Pascarella "Q" (Charcoal)

Sprinklers, fueled by the lake, are finally off and a hush settles over the surrounding area. The freshly cut grass glistens with the nourishing water, and the blazing red ixora offer their beauty to all who behold it. A chorus of frogs croak to the dawning day, and small lizards dart around the patio screen in a disjointed dance, every noise setting them in motion. Nearby a grasshopper drills to the daybreak. The chaos of the morning routine will soon be over and I sip my morning coffee on the patio. I look to the lake to restore my inner peace amidst the mayhem of the day.

The lake is quite narrow and appears to hug our backyard. My thick Cuban coffee and I witness the peaceful stillness of its glassy veneer. No ripple, no comment, just calm, quiet acceptance of the day. She embraces the warming sun, reflecting its brilliance in her calm, abiding way. Two young turtles clamber onto a rock by the water's edge, the happy couple surveying the quietude engulfing the area. On the far side, an almost fully-grown alligator dozes on the grassy bank. Only last week, he viciously attacked and slaughtered a neighbor's cherished cocker spaniel. He has eluded Florida Game and Fisheries for many months, taking refuge in the deep waters. Lime green parakeets flutter around the bird feeder hanging on the peeling gumbo limbo tree. The birds echo the joy of morning as the water reflects the path of the sun.

As the morning grows older, a large army of charcoal storm clouds assemble to the south. The tempo of the wind increases, its voice becoming louder and stronger, its strength creating larger and larger waves on the water. Birds are dipping in the howling, rushing air. The angry clouds advance on the lake issuing thunderous war cries. Palm trees stand sentinel around the lake with huge fronds flailing, watching the onslaught. The fierce rain falls harshly, pounding the surface of the water. Lightening charges,

striking without mercy, but is unable to shake the peace in the depth of her soul.

Afternoon draws on, the storm shrinking and retreating, seeing the futility of the assault. A whispering breeze massages the water, creating passive ripples. An imposing silver heron settles on the screen roof, his feathered crown bowing to the passing wind. He secures his footing, his spindly legs belying his hunting prowess. Beaded eyes keenly observe the water. With finely honed reflexes, he dives for the kill. The lake holds the choicest meals for this skilled fisherman. Fish nibble at the insects dancing around the undulating surface. Vicious dragonflies swoop for food, enjoying a frenzied feast of smaller, unsuspecting insects. Their veined wings never rest, even for a moment. Myriads of tadpoles frantically seek protection among the water lilies and weeds dotted around the edge. The cycle of life dictates that only a few will see adulthood. The lake witnesses the impermanence of life for so many creatures and nourishes them all, living and dying, in her moist embrace.

The birds sing a final farewell as the fiery orb makes his dramatic finale. Peace is restored, accompanied by the orchestra of humming bugs. Once more she is still. The silver lady of the night rises slowly in modest glory, her rays exalting the harmony of nature. The celestial moonlight pierces the water, uniting clarity and peace. The illusion is utterly perfect. When I immerse myself in its beauty, there is no duality. All that is reflected in the lake is of the lake, and not separate. At last I understand her peace.



Ian Witten "untitled"

Safe Harbor

I sit upon encrusted stones
Here in the mighty harbor
The sun has slipped well past noon
My ship sleeps restlessly in port

The years have torn my hands, my eyes
Are growing old
Yet now I wonder still where
Shall I be off to and when

Never having set wind to sail
Nor challenged the helm at storm
I have waited patiently
For my course to be plotted

Everything I thought I needed
I was sure could be found here
But the concrete and the asphalt
The desperation of uncertainty
Have imprisoned me

Look now at my feeble
Ship rusted and creaking
But seaworthy still
The wind I forbade to
Press the sails
Nor salt spray stain
Decks I have failed to pace

The horizon cries its beckoning call
I must sail before night descends
On these wasted weary dreams
To at last course an ocean of doubt
On my own once 'fore
My eyelids close forever

Mystery, the strangeness of life
Swept over my hull like raging swells
I sought charted waters
Seeking paradise only to learn that

Fear and foolishness are loathsome
Friends and for too long
My closest companions

I have lied to myself mostly
Believing adventure would
Be tucked into the hold
Lusting for more
In ports of ill reputation
But too soon fell in love
With the key and the cargo

This hour the sun will set
No time to sound the depths
Or to ponder the red sky warning
Curse the cannon
Damn the shouting
I don't hear them anymore

Weaker arms now hoist the sail
Left for wild fate to fill
The sword of my mouth
Dashes the cords
Holding everything in place

The anchor chain so rusted
So many years at idle
In its salty recline
Holds tight to the bottom
It uplls everything
Down with it

With one last cry I break the chains
Let the anchors cast into the deep
My ship it moves as it was meant
The breeze and sun dance merrily
The anchor I will not need
And now realize I never did



Teresa Tooley "Untitled" (Pastel)

I saw her again, eyes like cornflower, hair like wind-blown wheat. She watched with haunted eyes, as I caressed the old, off-white keys. She leaned against the piano, shivering with the vibrations of strings against spruce an angel in a great black wing. I played the Chopin. The one I learned from Mama. The one she would play when she told me stories of Gram and the war. The one that winds through the air like gyroscopes, balancing everything until the slow, singing section takes us away to some somber place that only knows loss. She knows loss, my muse. I can see it in her countenance in her protracted stare.

I finished the piece through the spinning and back to the loss, refrained and suspended in long trails of notes. I watched a tear make its long way down her cheek. Then, I heard it again, the melody that comes. But, I only know it when she's here. And I never know when she'll appear. I don't even know where she comes from. I'm not sure I want to.

I pulled out a piece of manuscript paper and jotted down the melody. She smiled. I started making notes about harmonies and chords that could support those perfect notes. I mentioned the instruments just piano and cello. I sketched some ideas. I played them to see if they were right. They were. I looked up and she was gone. I poured myself a glass of wine and thought it might be time for bed.

After a good sleep, I woke up, showered, and made some coffee. I tried to remember the melody, but it vanished like dreams. I sat down to the keyboard and looked at the manuscript. Sunlight poured through the curtains and glistered in the air. I thought I detected her shape, but it was just an illusion.

I played through the notes I made the night before. It was still right. Still there. I took out my four track recorder

and laid down a track of what I had so far. After recording, I had some breakfast and left for work, humming pieces of melody and similar themes on the bus, in the office, everywhere, smiling brightly.

After work, I went to see Gram at the house. She was in her room knitting a sweater. It's for your cousin, Ernestine, she said. I could see the green numbers on her forearm as she stretched; I shuddered. I always did.

She was 22 when it happened. A virtuoso cellist touring Eastern Europe. A Jew. She received a letter that she was needed by relatives in Warsaw, Poland. She took the train tickets and was on her way. 1939. On her way to a few months of horror, watching friends, family, and strangers die while she was kept alive to slide her bow against the four strings, the strings that lead to her escape.

The camp officials had ordered a concert in a small town square for local S.S and Gestapo officers. They wanted chamber music. A quartet. Gram played cello in three Beethoven piano quartets. During intermission, she received a note that something would happen. She should not be scared and trust the people who are trying to help her. She played the Beethoven while her heart beat like a manic metronome.

And then it happened. Gun shots. Confusion. S.S officers running everywhere. And as a bullet entered the pianist, someone grabbed Gram and took her away. Down one street and another, they ran until they got to a blind alley where they hid for hours. And when the noise was gone, the stranger took her up a fire escape to an apartment. She was safe. She was free. She was on a train to the Mediterranean and passage to America within a few days.

She doesn't speak about those times. I learned everything from Mama, before she died. About her birth on the ship to New York. About her father. About piano lessons in an old schoolhouse on Long Island. Gram used to hit Mama's hands with a ruler, until she remembered how much

that made her hate the piano. She told me about the family's piano back in Austria. She said one day we would get it back, and we did.

I remember it. We walked up the lane to number 23, an old row house in an affluent neighborhood. The housekeeper let us in and brought us to the full floor attic where the old possessions of pre-war tenants had been hidden. And there, in a large room was the piano. A '74 Bosendorfer grand, made of rosewood with inlaid gold leaf. She was beautiful.

I sat with her. This climate had kept her nearly in tune all these years. I pulled up a chair, depressed the sustain pedal and played something, a jazz lick. She sighed. We sang together for a some time.

She's yours.

She's mine, I sighed.

We shipped her home, and she's been with me ever since. Someone once said that these pianos are haunted the spruce from the Stradivarius forests filled with nymphs or faer folk. I'm not sure. But I knew she was alive, under my hands.

I stayed with Gram for a few hours, but I knew I had to get back. I had to finish.

I wrote for hours that night. I felt the winds of those days in Poland grab me and shake me. I knew something that wasn't mine. These notes weren't mine. But, I wrote them on paper. And I was happy.

I didn't see my muse. I'm not sure why. I would have thought she'd want to see this completed. A Sonata for Cello and Piano. Three movements all hinging on the perfect motive the perfect group of notes.

I went to see Gram the next night. I needed to show someone.

I've been writing.

Oh?

Yes, a sonata for cello and piano.

Oh! Isn't that wonderful! Play it for me.

I walked to the small upright in the corner. I warmed up with some scales and a little Mozart. Grandma loves Mozart. Then, I played the first section, similar to Mama's Chopin, the left-hand playing a sea of notes to float the melody above.

Grandma gasped, as if the piano had grown limbs and choked her with small, mad hands.

I know that. I know that melody. She was white as the doilies on the card table where she sat, trying to find her precious breath.

What's wrong, Gram?

I know that melody. But, how?

And she appeared, luminous and brilliant, in a white peasant dress, her hair in white ribbons. Gram stared.

Clara!

Clara smiled and took Gram's hand. They held each other for a long time.

I don't understand.

You know her? I said.

Clara and I, we were prisoners together. We were roommates. We played together in the Orchestra. She played piano. I played cello. They were good to musicians. We kept spirits up. We were writing this together. This Sonata. But she died before we could finish. She died the day I escaped. There was a gunshot. Oh, Clara!

Gram cried and held her lost friend. And she took my face in her hand and kissed me gently.

Play, darling. Play.

She walked to the cello that rested in the corner and took the bow like it has never been separated from her hand. And she played. It was exactly what I heard, in my mind all those times. It was our Sonata. Of loss. Of memories. Of possibilities.

Featured Sculptor:

Nicholas Whipple

"Portrait of an Artist"



"Transcending Superficiality"



"Midnight"





"P'an Ku's Fleas"

Elozona "Ursula" Aligbe

Michelle Becker

Daniel Butler

Grant Clyman

Alexis Cohen

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